

Mequitta Ahuja

MA

AICON ART

Mequitta Ahuja

MA



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Introduction

I first encountered Mequitta's works in her Baltimore home a few years ago with my colleague Hussain Khanbhai. We left her studio visually enriched and a few plants (her sunny house was full of plants!) heavier. Her works left an impression, and we did our best to bring her into the gallery. Initially we showed her works in *Intricacies: Fragment and Meaning*, a group show. We are delighted to now present *Ma*, the first solo exhibition of Mequitta Ahuja at Aicon Art.

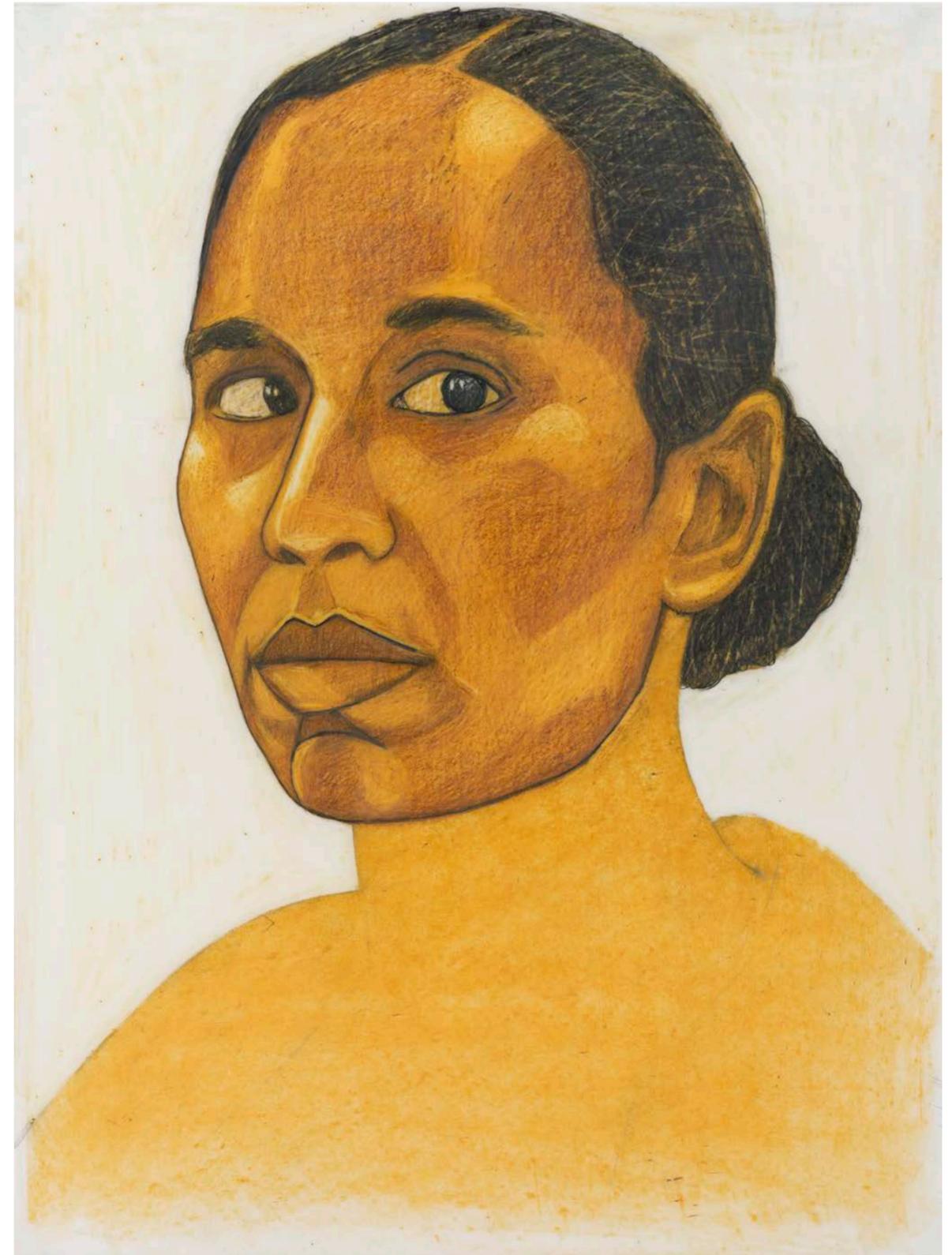
To say the first few years working with Mequitta have been exciting would be a gross understatement. We have placed her works in museums around the world, and interest in her works has become, at times, overwhelming. We have faced many "good problems" together.

In *Ma* we have two large canvases that, at first sight, resemble Matisse cut outs such as those in the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence, but Mequitta's works quickly diverge from the decorative as their difficult emotional register comes into focus. Created using a different process than her earlier works, they are uniquely bold, elegant and daring. What connects her bodies of works, is the self-portrait. Like Rembrandt or Freud, they are not necessarily flattering but always authentic, truthful and poignant. There are numerous self-portraits in this exhibition, both on canvas and drafting film.

In the run up to the exhibition, I asked Mequitta about her style changes throughout her career. She said it was the luxury of not being a particularly successful artist—she was not pigeonholed into a specific style. This struck me as an honest and pure answer. Now, with the success and spotlight firmly on Mequitta and her artistic practice, she will have the challenge of continuing to surprise and delight her admirers. I feel lucky to be in her orbit, secure in knowing that I will not be disappointed!

Thank you Mequitta for all of your hard work, and thank you Jordan, Leila, Jodi, Matt, Brooke and everyone on the Aicon Art Team for your contributions, and, of course, the wonderful Brian and Sule.

Kind Regards,
Harry Hutchison
Director, Aicon Art



Panic/Panic

By Mequitta Ahuja, 2020

1. September 7, 2019. It is our first night sleeping in our new house, my husband, my son, and myself. I am walking the length of the upstairs hallway, heading to bed. The hallway is both corridor and balcony. It overlooks the living room. Across from me, on the opposite side of the room below, is the house's main feature: a two-story window. I absentmindedly turn my head towards it. This is when the apparition occurs, when the thing I know becomes a thing I believe. Outside, it is black night; inside, bright illumination. The transparent window has turned reflective. Suddenly, I am here and over there, and my surprise is a jolt from way back. I was in this house thirty years ago. What is happening now happened then. I could not remember in daylight. My memory requires night. My presence now, in this house, has the feeling of inevitability. I live in the house behind the house I grew up in. Me beside adolescent me: this is my new daily reality. I am here, and I was here.

2. The doctor scraped my uterus because hurt causes healing and healing promotes growth. That's what we need: productive development, new life. Removal gives way to form, if you're lucky. The doctor scraped; something sloughed, disintegrated, reabsorbed, became imbedded. It is now our system of renewal. There's not much else I can do. I scrape too. Loss is embodied in the taking away. Our loss is profound. A few months before she died, I came upon my mother, dancing with the television on. I saw her through the window.

I birthed Sule. Sonja birthed me. Madeline birthed Sonja; back and back and back, to our shared Primordial Ma.

Primordial Ma was a Black woman who carried within her the traits for White skin. Her beautiful code becomes us. We are tethered together in her web of discord, discourse, disease; in trouble together, entrusted together.

I make paintings by scraping away paint, figuring some-



Sonja Ahuja (1949–2020) dancing at a wedding on Whidbey Island, 2014



Merge, 2020, Oil on polyester drafting film, 33 x 33 in.

thing new out of loss. What's left behind—that's the painting. The foundational contrast is thick and thin, opacity and transparency. Blue is the masstone and blue is the light. Blood-clot red is the masstone and pink is the light.

3. I paint the dress blue thinking that I am painting it as a base coat, but the color reveals itself to be the one, the final color. This surprises and excites me. It opens new paths, and my imagination grows. I fill with a feeling of calm enthusiasm.

Days later, I return to an earlier canvas. I look now with suspicion at the color of the dress in it: nameless gray. Unlike the blue, whose stillness is an anchor, the gray is blandly inert. I mix a paint to match the blue and lay it in with confidence, but it seems wrong. Knowing that an early judgment is a misinformed judgement, I persist. But apparently that too is wrong because recognizing mistakes early is efficient. I stare and consider, and then I am sure. It's not the color that's wrong, it's the color's value. *It's too dark. Or is it too light?* I vary its brightness only to lose myself in coats of confusion. A painting-specific panic like I haven't felt in years. No Mama to call. "It's all about problem-solving," she would say. So, I say that to myself, making it rational, something to work through, not react to. I call on the management part of my brain. I try to quiet the panic in my body.

I could retreat to the nameless gray, but I want something better. As with the blue, the final color surprises me—*pink?* When I hit on it, I temper how ridiculous it seems by

methodically determining its hue and value. I paint it on the small study first, tuning the color up and down the scale. I feel uneasy. Moving to the full-size canvas, I forge ahead cautiously, putting down just enough paint that if I need to, I can easily wipe it away. I keep asking myself the same question: *Is it working?* Every few brushstrokes, I step away to look. But *I don't know*, and still *I don't know*. It feels strange. I feel strange. It's the right color but the wrong emotion; happy where it ought to be sad. I am sad. I feel lost. I look back through my photographs, a record of the painting's development, and then I see my way through. *I've achieved the color. I've achieved the value. Now, it's a problem of treatment.* I take up my palette knife, and in a few strokes, everything changes. What was perky is now nostalgia: pink as girlhood. It is my first moment of painting elation since I last spoke with my mother.

4. The words "Mom and Dad's" or "My parents' house" feel cumbersome. I ask my husband, "What should we call them?" "How about," he says, "*the neighbors.*" We laugh. What I don't know is that this naming will help me later, as I buck against "Dad's house." I might as well say, "The house where Mom no longer lives"; or, "The place Mom died"; or, "The house where we used to live as a family, but time has passed, and those days are over, no sudden return to our earlier configuration on days of celebration because the matriarch is gone, and she'll be gone forever." Every time I think of something I've left there—my son's slipper socks, my cell phone, or when I need another egg, onion, or point of view—linguistic ambiguity helps me. Plural or possessive: "the neighbors," "the neighbor's," "the neighbors'." When you say it out loud, you don't have to clarify.



Primary Love, 2020, Oil on canvas, 72 x 84 in.



Portrait of Her Mother, 2020, Oil on canvas, 72 x 84 in.

5. “He will be the color of gold,” my mother proclaimed.

Two and a half weeks before we learn of her cancer, I am laboring too long. C-section. Enter, the Nervous Anesthesiologist: “I have to ask, were your eyes like that when you came in?”

Seated outside in the grass, closing my good eye, I stare at my son. I turn my errant eye into a portal. This eye is for Mom.

6. I have no record of the painting for which I took, as source material, thirty-three photographs of Mom and myself. We’d used the camera’s timer to mark out an arrhythmia of gestures and poses; of pushing, pulling, a mock struggle. In one we are visibly laughing, our naked bodies angling toward and against. I filed the photos, several to a plastic sleeve, in a binder, to await my future.

If I were making that painting now, I’d photograph it when, like a juggler, I had all of the parts—composition, color, paint-handling—rising and dancing; and I’d photograph it once I’d dropped them. Back then, the panic overwhelmed. I was unable to quiet it enough to make a record. But I remember. It was my final year of graduate school. I took the subway early in the morning, knowing I’d be the only student in the studio building—wanting quiet, needing focus. And then, being there, under the fluorescent lights, standing in my ugly clothes, more paint-splattered than paint-splattered. I was making something good, at long last; then losing it fast. *Could I save it?* There had been transparency, the white ground of the canvas showing through the fluid blue. But no, I confused the light achieved by transparency for what you get with a tint. I don’t need a photograph

to remember. I mixed white into blue. I dripped it on top, just like I’d dripped the thinned-out, uninflected blue. My panic had risen, and rather than heed it, I’d worked to turn the volume down. *I can do this. I can make it work.* I don’t have to remember ripping the thing off its frame, rolling it up, as if carefully, only then to angle its one half up to press it back against itself, like breaking a neck, so as to cram it into the dumpster.

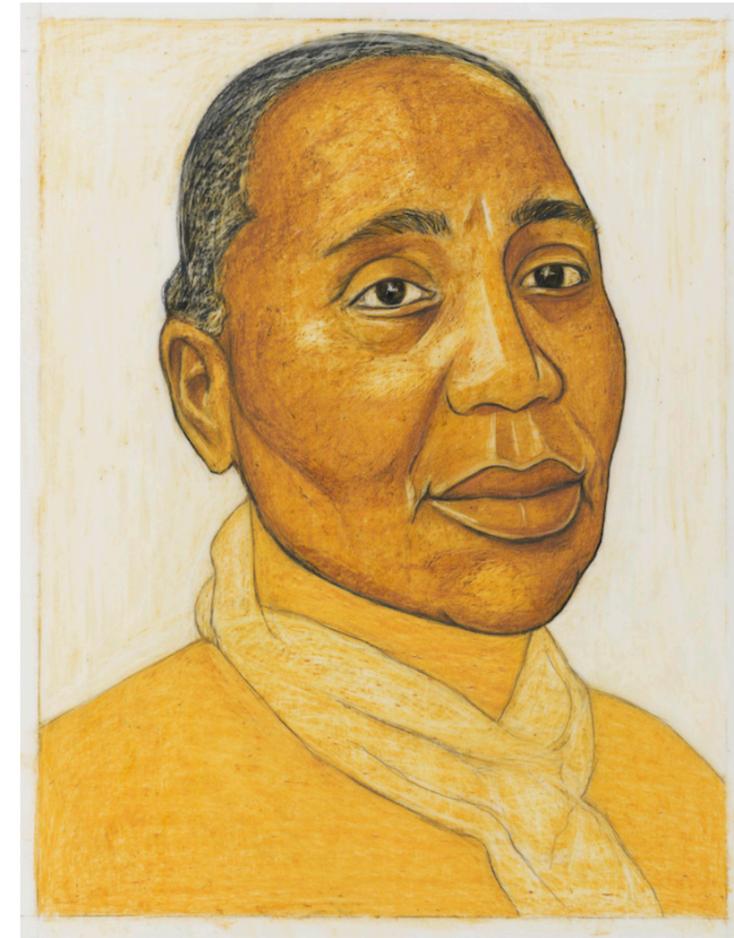
Eighteen years later. I’m standing in the in-law suite of my new house, a wing of interconnected rooms that I’ve converted into my studio. *What do I do now?* My son is napping, and I am seized by how little time I have. *Quick! Make something!* Can I even work like this? I think of those photos, knowing that if I can find them, I can work. It was nearly two decades ago, yet I find them almost immediately. I show Mom. “I miss my flesh,” she says.

7. *Is it possible to make a painting that frees you from a certain kind of writing? A painting that does the work of the artist’s statement, so that the writing can do a different job? Can you get your audience to not only look but also listen to painting? A work that is a work and also documentation? A work that is an exposition of its own reason for being?*

8. First, I’ll say, “Mom, you and Dad should buy that house.” Mom will say, “I’d love to, but.” Then I’ll tell my husband, “Your parents should buy that house.” Because I’ll know by then that what we really ought to do is consolidate our love; we should get it all in one place and attend to it properly. Finally, I’ll say, “I need to buy that house.”



Primary Love, study, 2020, Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 in.



Portrait of Sonja, 2020, Colored pencil on paper, 19 x 15 in.

9. Mom perseverating on one of one hundred worries—worries about Elizabeth from book group, worries about Uncle Michael, worries about America, worries about Black America, worries about the pandemic. All of which feel, to me, redeemable in ways that Mom’s own health does not.

Dad: “What is it like for you to see Mom so thin?” Me: “I always knew Mom had big eyes, but they keep getting bigger.”

After, I’ll learn Mom’s contours in new ways, drawing her face again and again, until I can caricature her features. It’s not her eyes that are particularly large—I’ll correct this in my mind—it’s their housing, her ample domed eyelids.

10. While drawing Mom’s portrait, I make a discovery. In a study, I depict myself holding a photograph of Mom, but the photograph could be any form of art. I plan to paint it as a collage in the final version, but then I look through art historical images and come across a portrait by Hans Holbein, of an “unknown lady.” I’m struck by its completeness and

simplicity. But the method seems devised for White skin, so how to use the method to describe Black skin? It’s a formal problem. It’s a problem of art history, the received form: buff-colored people drawn on buff-colored paper. *Will Black skin break the unity of the figure and the ground? Will Black skin feel like an interruption?* But then, a realization: the buff-colored ground is not natural, it’s imposed. *Holbein tinted his paper!* I use pigment sticks to color the ground. I erase around the figure to establish what is figure and what is page. This is a new way to draw for me, and it extends my new subtractive method. I apply the ground and pull the image out. The figure and the ground are naturally united.

11. In the immediate aftermath, I felt the panic in my chest and stomach. Losing Mom had always been my greatest fear. It is tremendously scary to be here without her. What are the stages people talk about...denial, anger...something... acceptance? Isn’t bargaining one of them?

What about fear? Absurd fears, like Mom not know-



Burst, 2019, Oil on polyester drafting film, 24 x 36 in.

ing she is dead. And reasonable fears, like not being able to call Mom to talk it through. Fear of needing Mom, fear of unmet needs that last forever, fear of forever, fear of something left incomplete. Will I remember something I forgot to tell her? Will I need to know something only she can answer? Will the future without Mom be awful? Fear of the future. Will anyone else die—my husband, my son, my sister, my dad, myself? When *will* we die?

Fear of the phone ringing at an odd hour. The news came by phone, my dad saying, “I think she’s passed away.” The “I think” left it as an open question. Minutes later, when I was holding her hand, kissing her forehead, the feeling was not different than how I have felt many times this year: unsure about how Mom was doing, noticing something new about her condition, her slurred speech, the way she held her mouth closed with her hand. *Had even the muscle of her jaw gone?* Then, the feeling of an open question closing. *I think Mom is dead.* Mom is dead. Fear of a potential, which is dread, becomes fear of the actual, which is ongoing fear.

12. What does race have to do with any of it? Why does race always have something to do with all of it? These are facts. Being Black makes us vulnerable in a special way. We are at risk of not being taken seriously; at risk of pain; at risk of too much medicine and not enough, of too much aggression and not enough care, of too much direct action, of too little direct action; of scrutiny, of neglect, of hostility; exaggerated sensitivity, too many assumptions, fewer options, too much history and having only just arrived on the scene. After she is gone, I find a slip of paper on which my mother wrote a note to herself, connecting her cancer with her Blackness. It throws me into turmoil.

13. The eraser is just the right amount of dense and rubbery. Dense enough to pull away the paint, rubbery enough to yield a fluid mark, to reclaim the paper’s surface. The eraser acts like a pencil; I use it for the contour. The palette knife acts like a rag; I use it for the body’s mass. Over time, this starts to feel off, and I reconsider the substance of the line. I ask myself: *What if I apply all of the paint,*

then simply reposition it? Once the paint is laid in, it remains as ground or as body, or it’s scraped away to make body and then piled into raised line. This economy feels right—for a time. But other tools change. I go big; I return to canvas. This is like starting over again. *How to make it like the drawings? Blue is the masstone. Blue is the light.* But the blue is not becoming light, not like in the drawings. And, working on the floor brought the texture of the carpet into my drawings. *Should I work on unstretched canvas? On thin canvas?* Well, abandon that. The painting will have to be its own thing. Still, the problem of the light is formidable, and same with the tools of removal. The eraser is no longer viable. The canvas is too large and too textured. I paint over canvases. I ruin work that almost worked. I paint, hold form, ward off panic.

14. It’s the fall before she’s gone. Mom and I are walking up Lost Acre Lane. “It’s like with the house reconstruction,” she is saying. “I told him, just tell me if it’s never going to happen.” “I’m glad it didn’t happen when I was growing up,” I say, using one of my old



Friction, 2020, Oil on polyester drafting film, 31 x 24 in.



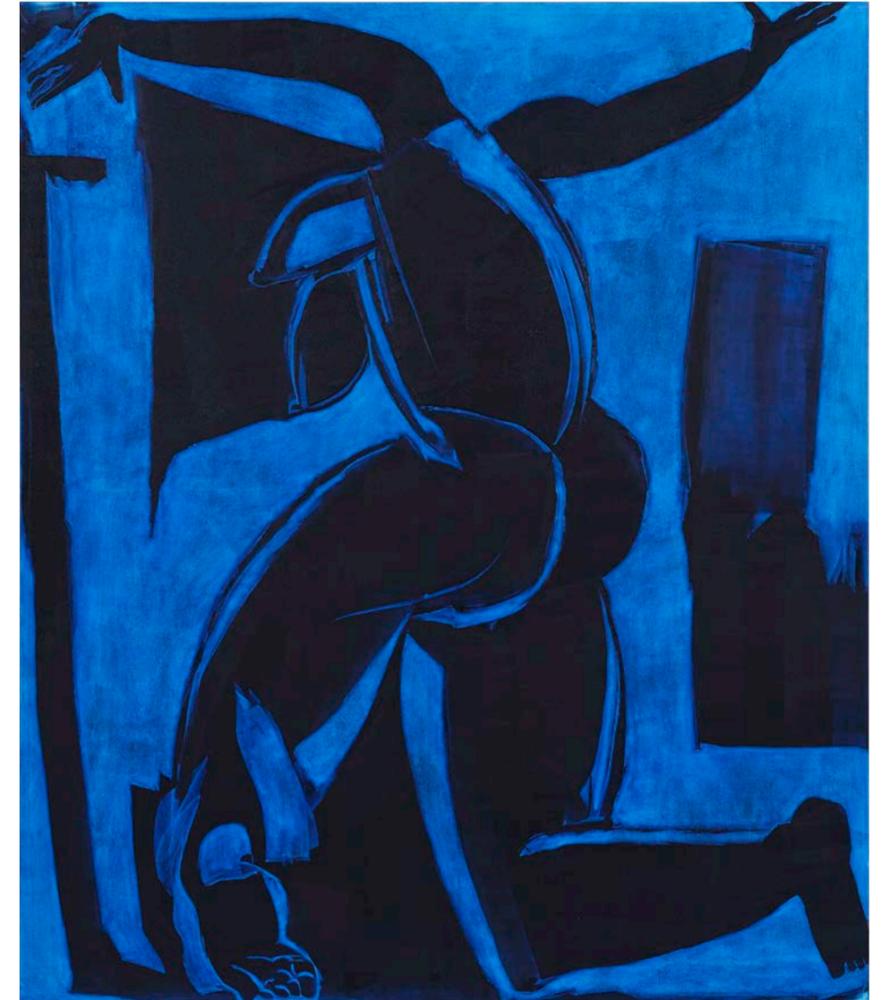
Generator, Study, 2019, Oil on polyester drafting film, 24 x 18 in.

tactics. “The kitchen was the warmest part of the house. We closed the door to trap the heat. It was the hearth.”

It’s the winter before she’s gone. “It’s off,” Mom says from the bed, holding the heater’s remote control. It’s difficult in the bedroom, a thousand dangers for a baby. The two that concern me most are: pills, the heater. If you touch the heater, it sounds an alarm. But the alarm only spooks us; a baby can’t heed its warning. I follow my son around the room, my attention divided. I knew of a time when my mother was not perpetually cold. “I feel bad that I can’t play with him,” Mom says, “but he’s okay with me just like this.” She is sitting up in bed, swaddled in blankets, very still, lacking the energy for animated speech. Her grandson climbs on, enjoys the sensation of tumbling over her resting legs.

15. March 5, 2020. “I might leave you in the spring,” her message states, “though I hope to experience the glories of summer.”

March 9, 2020. Mom and I spend an unseasonably warm day outside in the sun.



Generator, 2020, Oil on canvas, 84 x 72 in.

16. Saturday, May 2, 2020. The last solid food Mom eats is peach ice cream. She doesn’t make it to summer. She dies the next day, May 3. On that final day, Mom is warm. I cover her with a blanket and feel heat rising off her skin. “Oh,” I say, “you’re warm.” “Yes,” she says, “I’m warm.” I want to remain long in the magic, living as grown-up neighbors. I pleaded for five years. What I got was nine months.

17. I dream of Mom. She is sitting in a chair, still as a statue. I open my arms and lean in to hug her. But as I get close, I rupture an invisible zone. My proximity sets off an alarm, a blast of sound: continuous, provoking panic, governing the rules of engagement. Sonja is dead.



Merge
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
33 x 33 in.



Emerge
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
33 x 33 in.



Primary Love, study
2020
Oil on canvas
36 x 42 in.



Bound
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Trial II
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
36 x 36 in.



Determine
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
36 x 24 in.



Gather
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
36 x 24 in.

Mirror
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
36 x 24 in.



The Privilege of Love

By Leila Grothe
Associate Curator of Contemporary Art
The Baltimore Museum of Art

Her gaze is arresting. She stands before the viewer larger than life size. She is full, frontal, and nude, occupying the center passage of the canvas. She takes shape in red chroma with a depth of color so absorbing that it is difficult to say if the hue is warm and welcoming or a signal of alarm. Her posture communicates ambiguously. Her arms gently wrap around her midsection, just below her breasts, where her hands are either self-embracing or nervously fidgeting. And that gaze. She looks directly and squarely, her head slightly tilted to her left. With the look and feel of a German Expressionist woodcut, she conveys a strength of feeling. One could read hope, anguish, peace. She pierces the viewer, breaking through any pretense that the painting does not incorporate *you* in its domain. She is doubled, appearing again to the right, distracted, involved, and untroubled. Viewing her feels voyeuristic given how exposed her every feeling seems in a private moment. The painting subsumes the viewer's emotional atmosphere.

And what about this emotional tone? It is helpful to acknowledge a moment. This painting directly addresses grief and dissolution, having been created while Ahuja accompanied the final months and days of her mother's life. Early in her mother's diagnosis of endometrial cancer, not long after her father called saying, "Mom's not been feeling well," not long after Ahuja's son was born, she had a discussion with her mother. Her mother did not want a recalibration of their relationship. So often during the late stages of a parent's life, the cared for child becomes the caretaker. It is cyclical and typically a fundamental alteration of an existing familial dynamic. But with Ahuja, that mother-daughter order did not invert, safeguarded as it was by her mother who did not want her diagnosis to interfere with her close relationship to her children. Rather, the transformation took place emotionally. Quite suddenly her mother's immaterial needs took primacy over the child's, and the concern for wellbeing transposed to the elder first. Care cannot be controlled.

That emotional register transcends into the viewing experience of the work. To the left of the central woman are two entangled figures. This vignette is based on a graduate school-era photograph taken of Ahuja and her mother. Again, ambiguity abounds. Are they embracing in laughter or carrying each other in lament? Arms and especially hands are crudely formed, with paint pulled together just

enough to imply motion. The twisting of bodies brings an appreciation of Renaissance composition into a formally Expressionist work. Ahuja looks for connections. She brings many ideas of the figure into one image, and many energies into one moment. This is to recognize that we can be multiple things at once. We manifest complexity.

Ahuja attended to the final days of her mother's life with gratitude, with pain, and with a radical sense of presence. This work is naturally tinged with anguish, but also possesses an appreciation for the inevitable cycles of life. Indeed, *Mother* reflects the material embodiment of Ahuja's experience, physically faithful to loss. The figures in this painting are created through a sculptural technique of removal. The artist initially applies a thick coating of red paint across the entire surface of the canvas, its deep hue heavy with association. The color evokes blood, the vehicle of life within our bodies and, when visible, an indication of a breach to the contained system of living creatures. Ahuja then pushes and scrapes this heavy layer of paint around and off the canvas. She uses density to create value and solid cords of paint to create line. Where the paint is removed completely, the canvas vibrates with its crimson residue in a bright warning. Or perhaps it functions as the red of a hibiscus flower, which blooms for only one day and reminds us to appreciate the present. The painterly technique of impasto, where paint is applied thickly to render the surface in evocative texture, has been employed for centuries. Van Gogh offers a particularly accessible example of the technique. However that method has historically been an additive process where artists garnish the canvas as one might decorate a cake. Instead, Ahuja erodes the canvas of material. Disappearance and loss are not simply metaphorical; they are tools.

Immediacy is reflected in the speed with which this painting was created. The pliability of the paint begins to evaporate from the moment it is exposed to the air. Ahuja must work quickly, with somewhere around twenty-four hours to compose before the image is set. The pace of production enables emotion to drive the composition with as much authority as intention. These paintings hold a different investment of time. Ahuja creates for herself an art emergency, where time cannot be wasted lest the entire painting die.



Mother, 2020, Oil on canvas, 84 x 80 in.

Transcendence is perennial in this painting. We keep photo albums, now largely relegated to the small screens of our cell phones, to remind us of our past. We look back at the clothes, the hairstyles, our smaller waistlines, and we remember. We perceive time as linear. A series of present moments strung together like frames in a filmstrip to create the illusion of time moving forward or tracking backwards. Ahuja's paintings operate differently. In her works, time is not immediately marked. Ahuja collapses time through generations and art historical eras. There is comfort in this

recurrent understanding of time. It follows circumstance rather than calendar. We have all collectively lost so much in this era of pandemic and global crisis. Ahuja offers solace that loss is part of the sequence of existing, and we will return and divide and combine again like the composite creatures that we are. This continuation is the true mark of time. *Mother* reminds us that we are so incredibly special because we care and are cared for, but really this rhythm of humankind is universal.

Keep

By Matthew Sharpe

Mequitta's mother, Sonja, was my mother's best friend. The mothers were the conduit connecting the two families. The last time I went to Sonja's house in Connecticut, in December of 2019, I told her I wanted to interview her about her friendship with my mother for a book I'm writing. Sonja told me that when she met my mother she felt she had already known her. By the time of my visit Mequitta and Brian and Sule had moved in next door to Sonja and Ashok, and I stopped by their house too. Mequitta told me in her kitchen that one of the things her mind kept doing was remembering events of the last couple of years and wondering if, when they happened, the cancer was already in her mother's body. "That time she visited me in Baltimore and was tired, did she have cancer *then*?"

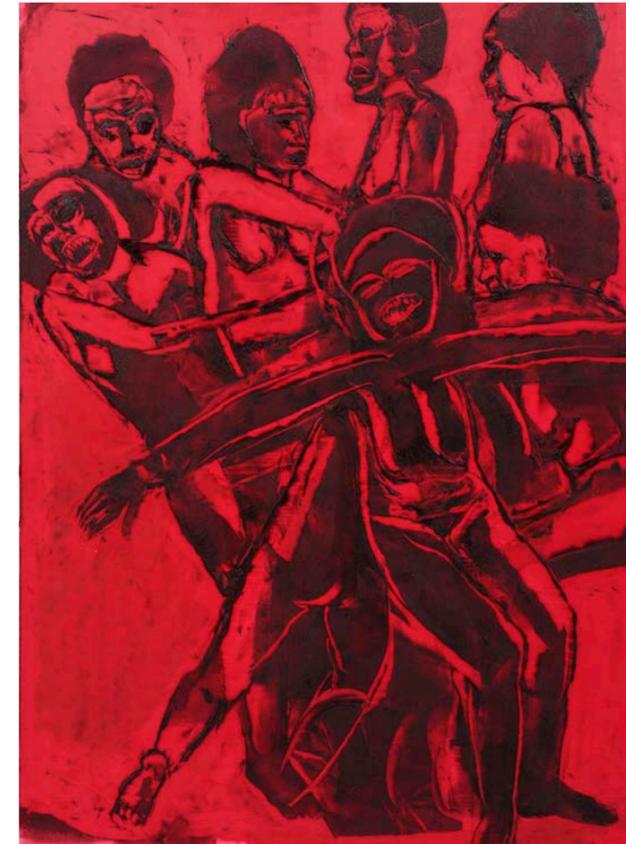
Mequitta also said "You should probably do that interview soon." It took me till the end of February, when Sonja told me in her matter of fact way that she would be at Memorial Sloane Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan for a procedure to shrink her ileostomy bag to make room for the larger tumors inside her. On February 27, 2020, I sat in a chair across from her. Late winter sunlight poured in through the south-facing hospital window and lit up her face, whose flesh the disease had diminished, but whose beauty it had, if anything, intensified. In the course of our conversation I asked her what she had meant when she

said she felt like she'd already known my mother when they met. She told me about being a child watching the absurdist Jewish comedian Professor Irwin Corey on *The Merv Griffin Show*, "probably the only Black kid in Cincinnati who loved Irwin Corey." As my mother would tell Sonja soon after they met, while Sonja was watching Corey in Cincinnati, my mother was marrying his brother-in-law in Boston, and he would be a part of her life for years to come.

My mother, Jackie, died a month before Sonja got her cancer diagnosis. "That last night that I visited her," Sonja said later in the conversation, "it was hard for me to get there, but it was one of those things that nothing was going to stop me, I was going to be there. And I was there. And maybe 15, 18 hours later, your sister calls me and says she's died.... I know Jackie was atheist. But I think that connection with that little kid in Cincinnati watching Professor Irwin Corey was just in that same space with Jackie right there in those last hours."

I see this phenomenon in many of Mequitta's paintings in this series, people and events miles and years apart occupying the same space, pictorial spaces that contain the past and present, that describe the way memory acts on time.

In her essay in this catalogue, Mequitta writes about a series of photographic studies she made with her mother when she was an art student, in which the two women, both



Keep, 2020, Oil on polyester drafting film, 29 x 21.5 in.

naked, are pushing and pulling at each other's bodies. (I'd like to pause here and remark on the rare closeness of a mother and her grown daughter so easily touching each other's bodies, the sort of connection most mothers and daughters leave behind in the nursery and resume perhaps only when the mother is near death.) Those photographs from two decades ago became the source material for many of the paintings in this series.

Keep is the name of a painting in which an anguished-faced figure, arms spread wide as Christ's, appears to

be holding back a small crowd of other figures in varying emotional states, in the posture of the manager of a Best Buy holding back a horde of shoppers at 8 am on Black Friday, or of a peace officer using her body as a cordon for a corrupt politician. Except the manager or officer is naked, and the crowd consists of earlier incarnations of herself and her mother, also naked, and it is not the bodies that are surging forward but their decay. The corrupt politician is none other than death.

The *Saint Columba Altarpiece*, a painting by the 15th-century Early Netherlandish artist Rogier van der Weyden, depicts the infant Jesus being adored by the Magi, while directly above him on a column of the manger hangs a small statue of his crucifixion.¹ The people in the painting are innocent of the crucifixion, but the painting represents Jesus' story as it is known in the minds of its viewers, in which Mary, giving birth to him, also gives birth to his death.² In *Keep*, the figures in the background are those of Mequitta and Sonja 20 years ago, innocent of what the future held for them, even as the cancer is, in a sense, already present in the looks on their faces.

"In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist?" asks Sigmund Freud in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia." "I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."³

Freud's vision is indeed far-fetched to the dead woman's son who is writing this essay. Preliminary results of my own experimentation with reality suggest that as long as I exist, my mother will exist. She will be sitting on the couch next to Sonja at book group, laughing about how Irwin Corey started his standup routines with "However,..." Sonja will give birth to Mequitta and Thaytia, she will marry Ashok, she will grow up in Cincinnati, she will be born and die and go on living. Like the figures in many of Mequitta's paintings, she will be limned in the light of love and grief.

1 Thanks to art historian Jacqueline Jung for referring me to this painting.

2 "And what kind of melancholy beauty did it give women when they were pregnant and standing, and in their big bodies, on which their narrow hands involuntarily rested, were two fruits: a child and a death." — Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2008).

3 Sigmund Freud and Philip Rieff, "Mourning and Melancholia," *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (Simon & Schuster, 2008).



Rogier van der Weyden, *St Columba Altarpiece*, 1455, Oil on oak panel, Alte Pinakothek, Munich





2019



Pages 28-29

Acre

2020

Oil on polyester drafting film

24 x 36 in.

Pages 30-31

Momentum

2020

Oil on polyester drafting film

20 x 36 in.

Pages 32-33

Hinge

2020

Oil on polyester drafting film

20 x 36 in.



Portrait of Her Mother

2020

Oil on canvas

72 x 84 in.

All This Beautiful Living Materiality: Style and Subject as a Familial Ecology in Mequitta Ahuja's *Ma* Series

By Dr. Jordan Amirkhani

Ma, mamma, mommy, (m)other, mom, mummy, mmm, me, my, my ma. "Ma" is a word, a sound, a cry, a speech act, an utterance. Stuttered into the world by babies before language is fully acquired, "Ma" is a summoning agent that calls towards the location of our origins, an invocation to the maternal order, a shout of offering to the body who gave and shaped our becoming, a jubilant, familiar, casual one-note song that in its brevity enacts the unmistakable bond between mother and child. "Ma" is inherently relational—a link between one and another, which is perhaps the most important thing.¹

So, what happens when the intended subject of that primordial cry of "Ma" is gone? What happens to the complex web of memories, experiences, and secrets—that great field of time formed over a long *durée* between a mother and their child—now that the mother is no longer there? Here? This seems to be what Mequitta Ahuja's recent body of work is both about and of: an inquiry into what form would be suitable for a loss this deep and specific, and whether images can bear the weight of this specific grief and all its tiny, unbearable fractures. If painting does indeed as TJ Clark says carry within itself "the ability to capture humans *in extremis*—every shadow and contour of our social and psychic experience" from monstrosity and ecstasy in Picasso and Rembrandt to vulnerability and rage in Neel and Kahlo, a daughter's loss must surely live amongst these realities too.² And yet, to turn the loss of "Ma" into mere subject matter doesn't seem to be the point in Ahuja's series; a mother's death is not a "topic" and to see it this way is to flatten the complexity of this event. There is so much more at work here.

A more suitable question for Ahuja's *Ma* series seems to be, can painting be and act as a form of remembrance, and if so, how? What combination of processes, materials, and stylistic tropes would support such a task? How can you make a painting as complex and contingent and beloved as a body of your mother and the time spent with her? What kind of capacity in this medium would register and enact all this beautiful, living materiality?

For this series of works, Ahuja seems to rely on style and substance—the "how" and the "what" of her paintings—to lead this quest. While style's significance has faced a slow demotion in art since the 1970's, its role in the history of painting has remained as a kind of reflex, where historical precedent and likeness remains sutured to the genre. As an artist mentored by the painter Kerry James Marshall, whose "mastery" of representational figurative painting calibrates what has been allowed to be beautiful and the ways in which the art institution has treated race as the canon's undeniable institutional construct, style for Ahuja forms the platform for her painterly interventions into the grand thematics of the Western canon and its many gendered, racial, ethnic, and cultural blind spots and disavowals. Style is a way of communicating identity through visual means, and Ahuja is an artist who like Marshall has absorbed the story of art in order to expand it, destroy it, critique it, and stretch it into a discourse that will contain and nurture her identity, body, and the constellation of experiences that define it.³ This can be seen in the postures and gestures of her figures culled from Classical forms and African and oceanic art of the diaspora, the drama of her narratives as complex and crowded as history paintings, the complex-

ity of her compositional arrangements, and the intensity of her color palette, all of which reveal Ahuja's awareness of the canon's ignorant, limited, violent attendance to women, Blackness, and melanated bodies. Just as Marshall has stated, "I wanted to satisfy myself when I painted...I wanted to seek comfort, to see dignity in paintings, so I painted what I needed to see"—so too has Ahuja worked to shape a style based in the tradition but in nurturing communion with her own experiences and realities.⁴ The *Ma* series is no different, and those familiar with Ahuja's work will recognize certain stylistic choices reappear differently in these works, such as her recapitulation of a bold blue tone that reverberates not only in her own oeuvre, but across the history of Christian art, the Northern Renaissance and Baroque eras, and through the titans of French modernism, filling bodies, identifying objects, and acting as the architectural support of the world, the history, the identities that have shaped her work.

However, style for Ahuja, in this series in particular, also has an external, social, and familial source, namely, a collection of personal, private images of Ahuja's mother, Sonja—the artist's matriarch and muse—whose presence and power accumulates within these works, guiding the stylistic codes as much as any artistic forefather. Thus style, in this series, is not just a continuation of the great paternal orders and aesthetic operations of painting, but a feminist critique of artistic development that takes the Mother as its most potent gravitational referent. This notion of style as familial and relational expands Ahuja's investments in responding to historical painting and the generations of painters across the Western canon who fought righteously for the medium's capacity to present likeness, build worlds, and articulate interiority. Just as families understand and construct themselves over time through generations of ancestors and clans and kin that came before (as Toni Morrison has said, "to know your mother is to also be in communion with the mothers that came before"), so too do these paintings enact the generational linkages of the family structure. From mother to daughter to newborn, but through artistic ancestors as well, from Holbein and Poussin, to Picasso, Kerry James Marshall, and Ahuja, too.⁵ Time is enacted as a palimpsest of artistic and dynastic kinship

simultaneously: Sonja is the Mother, the teacher, the ancestor, the artist, she is Madonna, maiden, model, muse, and maker. She is "Ma," scattered across the multiple subjectivities and embodied characterizations of women across the visual tradition. She is the ground on which artistic tradition lies.

It seems that in order to accomplish this task of creating a series of works that would both honor and embody Sonja's significant place within the framework of her own family and her own aesthetic history, Ahuja's paintings needed a set of internal governances that would provide support for this premise—an entanglement of medium-adjacent outlets and avenues that her works could roam through, gather energy from, and return to. The works needed a structure that would care for and contain the works in all their discrete individuality together, much like a home contains a family, like a body contains organs. While oil on canvas and polyester drafting film take central roles in this series—the weight of this historic medium loom large across the trajectory of Ahuja's career—the references to other media abound. Photographs, drawings, sketches, and works on paper are painted into these pictures, forming an alternative to the modernist trope of medium-specificity or postmodern relativism. Instead of pitting one genre against another, Ahuja's series encourages an ecological, familial definition of two-dimensional picture-making. A painted photograph or drawing incorporated into a painting, as in the case of *Primary Love, study* (2020), defines each image as a unique participant in a social record, a blade of grass in an infinite field of accumulated memories that when gathered together can mark a life lived to/with others. Thus, there is a sense that this portfolio of works enacts a kind of family album, with Sonja's image encircling the images, flickering in and out of the cycle, regenerating and renewing themselves into new image systems and references similar to the patterns of eye colors, hair textures, or skin tones that can either repeat or skip generations. Whether through medium or motif, the temporality of these works is constructed like a family archive: repeating, renewing, resolving, reforming traits in communion with one other, committed to working together as a whole, its different cycles enlisted as if it had been asked to create a suitable account of a body and its

1 See British novelist Sheila Heti's book, *Motherhood*, London: Harville Secker, 2018, pg. 21.

2 See TJ Clark's essay on Pablo Picasso's mural-size painting *Guernica* (1939) "Picasso and Tragedy" in *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 39, No. 16, August 17, 2017, Link: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n16/t.j.-clark/picasso-and-tragedy>

3 For a powerful treatise on style in the history of art, see Jas Elsner's definition of it his essay titled "Style," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pg. 98-109.

4 See painter Kerry James Marshall in conversation with Chief Curator Helen Molesworth in support of the exhibition *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, California on May 30, 2017. Link: <https://www.moca.org/program/kerry-james-marshall-and-helen-molesworth-in-conversation>

5 See Andrea Reilly's *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, Albany: State University of New York, 2004, pg. 47-48.

systems, all working independently together. This series is truly a “body of work,” which “works like a body.” In this case, repetition of forms or oscillating between different media is not evidence of any indecision or errancy on Ahuja’s part, but a kind of incorporation of the frenetic measure of living and working through a beloved’s passing, finding and incorporating multiple media to wade through the deep archive of memories and image-systems that document Sonja’s life and the memories of her.

All paintings carry within them access to multiple times: the time of the artist’s labor in the studio, the time of the painting and its own becoming, and the time of the subject encased in the work of art itself enveloped in the world-space of the artwork itself. Time is the great life-force of art, a modality of life itself, and it is in this intersection of the life of a work and the life of the subject that remains so crucial to this series. As Ahuja writes in “Panic/Panic,” her essay that accompanies this exhibition, the process capitalized in this series unveiled itself *over* and *in* time through a constellation of quick decisions, tiny epiphanies, casual experiments, each moment of work bound by the limits and constraints that form when babies, parents, grandparents, partners, and artists are living in close proximity to one another, and when monitoring the health of a loved one is at the center of a family’s operations. It is these moments of fast-and-slow, still-and-moving, sketch-and-painting, study-and-masterpiece that make this series so full and dynamic. Thus, this series enacts a body of work framed by multiple temporalities, the most important of which is the artist’s mother whose being in image and body undulates across pasts and presents, giving a heartbeat, a material condition to this special project. More than a monument or memorial, the *Ma* series is a quilt for Sonja, a way to pass an image of her through to future times, fashioned from images and memories of her body, her being, the necessity of her, the time lived belonging alongside her, the full thickness of which is enacted on each canvas and in every cross-pollination.

In the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Ms. Brooke Davis Anderson,
Edna S. Tuttleman Director of the Museum,
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

"I first learned of Mequitta Ahuja and her artwork from PAFA's Curator of Contemporary Art, Jodi Throckmorton. At the time, Jodi was proposing we acquire a painting --- *A Real Allegory of Her Studio*--- by Ahuja for our museum's permanent collection. I was immediately enthralled by the artist's sophisticated technique, complex composition, and layered narrative, all of which created an intoxicating energy in the artwork.

Swirling around the central figure we see art history books, crumpled paper, prayer cards, a sketch pad, and floating forms. Mequitta Ahuja extends this paper motif with the trompe l'oeil of an uplifted page on the lower right corner of the painting: essentially turning this painting into a book, its pages being turned. Ahuja writes herself into the story.

A nude woman painted and centered on an artist's canvas is not unusual in art history. In fact, it is a regular and all-too-common image in art history. Less common is seeing a woman of color centered in that same space. In the history of western art, it is nearly singular.

Ahuja paints such an image with herself as the subject, with her back to the viewer, slightly angled as an invitation. Both the angle of her protruding left arm toward the viewer and her focused gaze away from the viewer tell us that the artist will determine the engagement: Mequitta Ahuja has the power.

In this painting she not only determines who can see her and how she will be seen, but the artist is also making sure that she will be seen in the histories being written, drawn, and preserved.

Mequitta Ahuja's painting *A Real Allegory of Her Studio* now in the permanent collection at PAFA, the first and oldest art museum in America."



A Real Allegory of Her Studio, 2015, Oil on canvas, 80 x 84 in.

Jodi Throckmorton, Curator of Contemporary Art,
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

"PAFA is so proud to have Mequitta Ahuja's *A Real Allegory of Her Studio* (2015) in the museum's permanent collection. I first learned about Mequitta's work when this painting was shown in the remarkable 2017 exhibition *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in the Diaspora* at the Asia Society in New York. I was struck by Mequitta's technical strength as a painter, as well as her deep knowledge of the histories of representation that inform her practice. She places herself at the center of intersecting lineages of painting—from Greek myths on the origin of painting to the work of Raja Ravi Varma—showing how she at once extends and disrupts these histories. For me, her work asks these questions of viewers and institutions alike—how are we implicated in these histories and how must we change to move forward?"



Friction
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Locus
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Zone
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Relinquish II
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
24 x 18 in.



Bundle
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Carry
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
31 x 24 in.



Suture
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
29 x 21.5 in.



Keep
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
29 x 21.5 in.



Set
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
29 x 21.5 in.



Rebound
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
29 x 21.5 in.

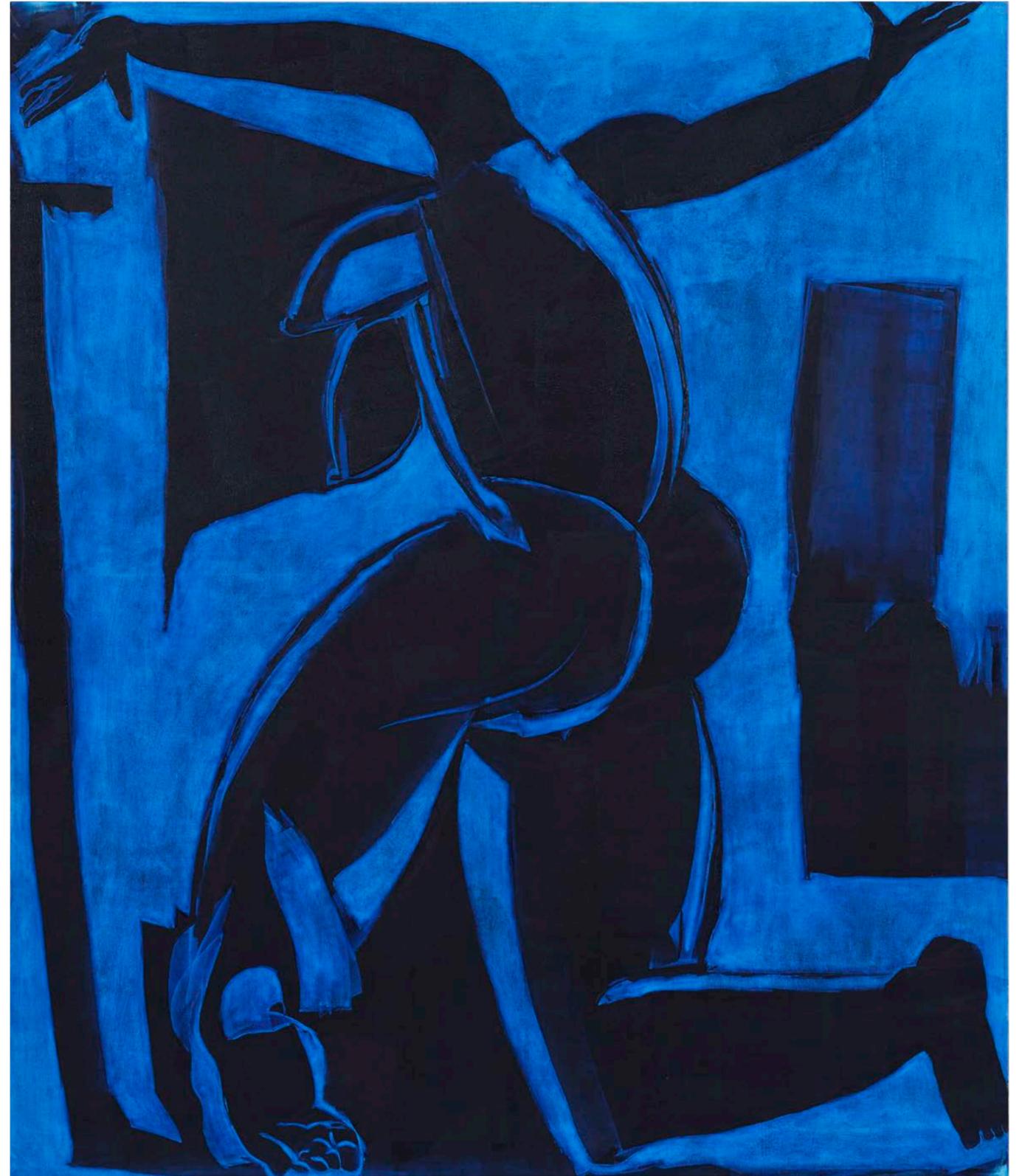
Term
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
29 x 21.5 in.



Term II
2020
Oil on polyester drafting film
28.5 x 21.5 in.



Generator
2020
Oil on canvas
84 x 72 in.



Regenerate
2020
Oil on canvas
84 x 80 in.



Scan
2020
Oil on canvas
84 x 80 in.



Mother
2020
Oil on canvas
84 x 80 in.

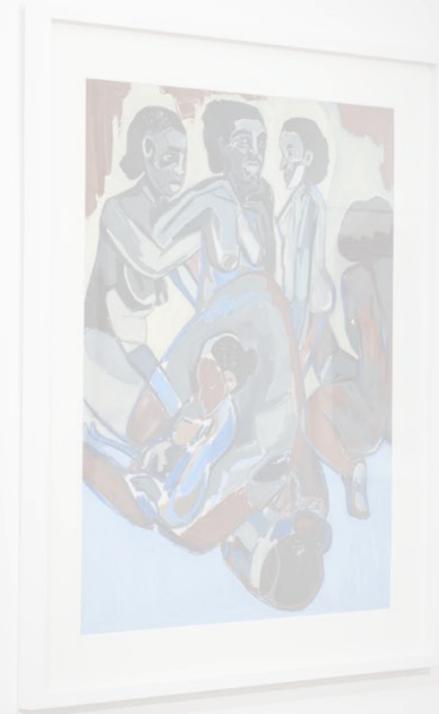




Primary Love
2020
Oil on canvas
84 x 72 in.

EXHIBITION

December 17th, 2020 – January 23rd, 2021



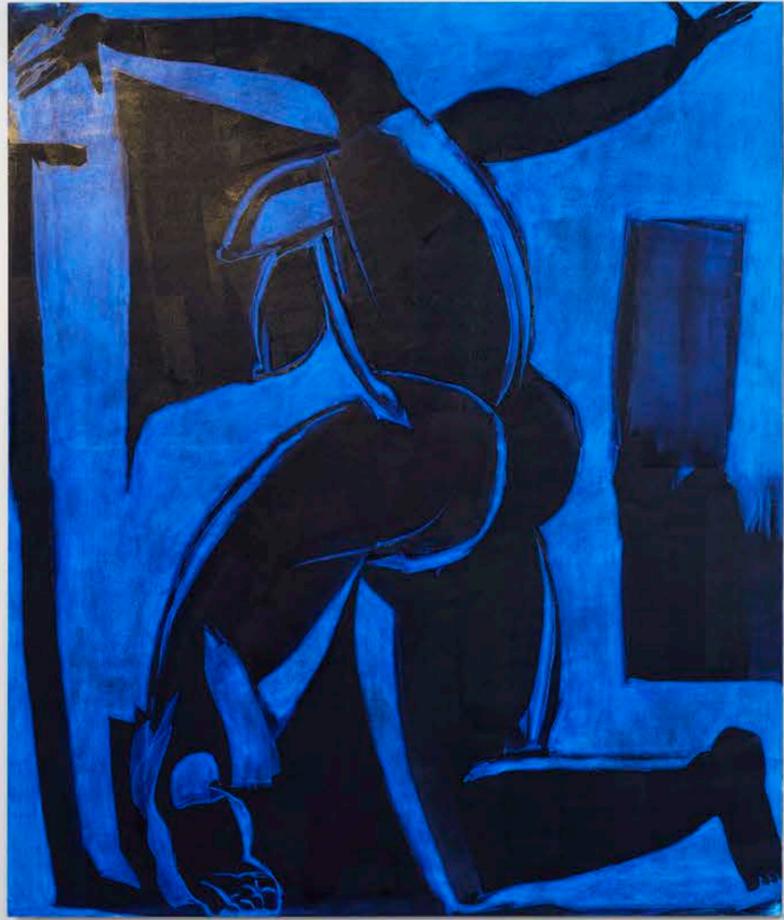
Mequitta Ahuja
Ma
December 17 – January 23, 2021

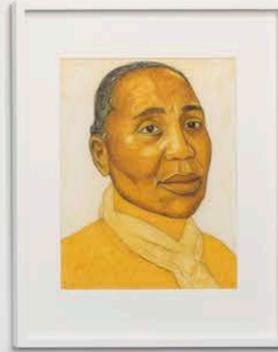




Mequitta Ahuja
Ma
December 17 - January 23, 2021







Mequitta Ahuja
Mequitta Ahuja
Mequitta Ahuja















ABOUT

Mequitta Ahuja

Mequitta Ahuja (b.1976), based in Baltimore, MD and Weston, CT, is contemporary figurative painter with African American and Indian American roots. Ahuja aims to hold and to embody in her work both politics of identity as well as the function of self-portraiture exemplified by Poussin's 1650 self-portrait: displaying authority within the history and discipline of painting. By merging past and present ideas of self-portraiture, Ahuja's work destabilizes the genre's old and current conventions. In addition to Poussin, the predecessors informing her approach are Velasquez's Las Meninas, Kerry James Marshall and the author Doris Lessing. Ahuja received her BA in 1998 from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, and her MFA in 2003 from the University of Illinois, Chicago. Ahuja's works have been widely exhibited, including venues such as the Phillips Collection, the Brooklyn Museum, Studio Museum in Harlem, Saatchi Gallery, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Crystal Bridges, Baltimore Museum of Art and Grand Rapids Art Museum. "Whip-smart and languorous" is how the July 24, 2017 issue of the New Yorker described a work by the artist, then on view at the Asia Society Museum. Ahuja is a 2018 Guggenheim fellow.

Select Solo Exhibitions

2020

Ma, Aicon Art, New York NY

2018

Notations, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK

2014

Automythography, The Dodd Contemporary Art Center, Athens, GA

2013

Mequitta Ahuja, Thierry Golberg Gallery, New York, NY

2012

Mequitta Ahuja and Robert Pruitt, Bakersfield Museum of Art, Bakersfield, CA (2-person show)

2010

Trois, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, France

Automythography II, Arthouse, Austin, TX

2009

Automythography I, BravinLee Programs, New York, NY

2008

Flowback, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX

2007

Encounters, BravinLee Programs, New York, NY

2005

Dancing on the Hide of Shere Khan, UBS 12X12, MCA, Chicago, IL

Select Group Exhibitions

2021

All Due Respect, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD

2020

Riff and Relations: African American Artists and the European Modernist Tradition, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

2019

Intricacies: Fragment and Meaning, Aicon Art, New York, NY

2018

About Face, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

For Freedom's 50 States Initiative, Billboard in Des Moines, IA

Embodied Politics, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

Infinite Spaces: Rediscovering PAFA's Permanent Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA

2017

The Art World We Want, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA

A Space for Thought, Brand New Gallery, Milan, Italy

American African American, Phillips, London, UK

Engender, Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in Diaspora, Asian Society, New York, NY

Sondheim Exhibition, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD

Face to Face, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA

Shifting: African-American Women and the Power of their Gaze, David C. Driskell Center, College Park, MD

2016

Past/Present/Future, Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids, MI

Champagne Life, Saatchi Gallery of Art, London, UK

Statements: African American Art from the Museum's Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

State of the Art: Discovering America Art Now, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN & Telfair Museum, Savannah, GA

2015

Sondheim Finalist Exhibition, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD

Mythopoeia, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK

2014

State of the Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR

If You Build It, No Longer Empty, New York, NY

Marks of Genius, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN

Leaves, Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, NY

How the Light Gets In, Glassell School of Art, New York, NY

2013

Portraiture Now: Drawing on the Edge, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

War Baby/Love Child, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL

Mixtopias, Visarts, Rockville, MD

2012

The Bearden Project, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Portraiture Now: Drawing on the Edge, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

In Between, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels, Belgium

Sleeping Inside Our Bodies, Union Art Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI

The Human Touch, The Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX

Red, Maison Particuliere, Brussels, Belgium

2011

Collected: Ritual, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Drawings for the New Century, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN

2010

Usable Pasts (Artists in Residence Exhibition), Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Freedom to Expand, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS

Body of Work (Women to Watch), National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC

Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC

Weaving in and Out, No Longer Empty, New York, NY

Until Now: Collecting the New (1960- 2010), Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN

New Works for the Collection, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX

2009

Undercover, Spelman College Museum of Fine Arts, Atlanta, GA

Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

Anomalies, Rossi and Rossi Gallery, London, UK

Wonder What the Others Are Up To, Gallery OED, Cochin, India

\$timulus Artadia Awardees Exhibition, DiverseWorks, Houston, TX

The Talented Ten, Deborah Colton Gallery, Houston, TX

2008

Houston Collects, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX

2007

Global Feminisms, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

Painters and Poets, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS,

2006

Chimaera, Tenri Cultural Institute of New York, NY

New Art Event, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS

Spirit and Psyche: The Figure Transformed, Highland Park Art Center, Highland Park, IL

2005

d'Afrique d'Asie, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, NY

Representations, Contemporary Art Workshop, Chicago, IL

2004

Baltimore/Chicago, Maryland Institute College of Art, Curated by Kerry James Marshall, Baltimore, MD

Awards

2018

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship

2013

Maryland Individual Artist Award

2011

Louis Comfort Tiffany Award

2009

Joan Mitchell Award

2008

Artadia Award, Houston

Cornelia and Meredith Long Prize, Inaugural Recipient

2003

Chicago Civic Arts Foundation, First Place

2002

University of Illinois Diversity Fellowship

Fellowships

2018

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship

2015

Dora Maar House, Artist in Residence, Menerbes, France

2014

Siena Art Institute, Artist in Residence, Siena, Italy

2011-2012

MICA, Stewart-McMillan Artist in Residence, Baltimore, MD

2009-2010

Studio Museum in Harlem, Artist in Residence, New York, NY

2006-2008

Core Program, Artist in Residence, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

Collections

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX

Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH

GAE LLC, an affiliate of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, AR

David C. Driskell Center, College Park, MD

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India

Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA

Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, Asbury, NJ

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

Royal Bank of Canada Wealth Management

Saatchi Gallery, London, UK

Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS

U.S. State Department, Mumbai Consulate, India

U.S. State Department, New Delhi, India

Education

2003

MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL

1998

BA, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

ABOUT

Aicon Art

At Aicon Art we specialize in modern and contemporary non-Western art with a special focus on South Asia. The New York gallery provides a vital platform for Modern and Contemporary artists from South Asia as well as the Middle East and, finally, diasporic artists to realize their vision in a global and ever-shifting world. Alongside in-depth, focused solo shows, the gallery presents a program of curated group exhibitions that are international in their scope and ambition. Following recent debates in institutional curating, the program deliberately links together art produced recently with art made in the latter half of the 20th Century. Through this, the gallery hopes to produce unexpected congruencies, shed light on multiple modernisms, make complex the designation “contemporary” and signal a shift away from simple survey exhibitions.

In solo shows, Aicon Art has shown the work of established artists such as M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, Rasheed Araeen, Rachid Koraïchi, Rekha Rodwittiya and S. H. Raza. The gallery has also presented ambitious solo shows of younger artists, such as Abdullah Syed, Abir Karmakar, Salman Toor, Adeela Suleman, and G. R. Iranna. Group shows have included *Readymade: Contemporary Art from Bangladesh* as well as *Between Line and Matter: Impulse of Minimalism in South Asia and the Middle East*. The gallery has collaborated with museums such as the Art Institute, Chicago; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Kiran Nadar Museum, New Delhi; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; Jewish Museum, New York and the Louvre, Abu Dhabi. Exhibitions have been reviewed and the gallery has been profiled by the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Times of London*, *Art Asia Pacific*, *ArtForum* and the *Financial Times*.

Select Solo Exhibitions

| | |
|---|--|
| 2020 Natvar Bhavsar, <i>Sublime Light</i> | Ghulam Mohammad, <i>Gunjaan</i> |
| Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, Ernest Mancoba | Mohammad Omer Khalil, <i>You Don't Have to Be</i> |
| Rasheed Araeen, <i>In the Midst of Darkness</i> | Victor Ekpuk, <i>Marks and Objects</i> |
| Nataraj Sharma, <i>Travel Log</i> | Jamini Roy, <i>Hemen Mazumdar: Two Rebels</i> |
| Pooja Iranna, <i>Silently...</i> | Natvar Bhavsar, <i>Beginnings</i> |
| Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, <i>Mixed Lines</i> | Ahmed Morsi, <i>The Flying Poet</i> |
| 2019 Bernardo Siciliano, <i>Pigs & Saints</i> | 2018 Salman Toor, <i>Time After Time</i> |
| Sheetal Gattani, <i>Unmaking Space</i> | Rachid Koraïchi, <i>Les Sept Stations Célestes</i> |

Rasheed Araeen, *Recent Works*

Jayasri Burman, *Born of Fire: A Tale for Our Times*

Mohammed Kazem, *Ways of Marking*

2017
G.R. Iranna, *The Primordial Ash*

Saad Qureshi, *When the Moon Split*

Manisha Parekh Open Studio

Surendran Nair, *Cuckoonebulopolis: (Flora and) Fauna*

Anjolie Ela Menon, *A Retrospective*

Ernest Mancoba

2016
Geometry and Symmetry, New Works by Rasheed Araeen

Sunil Gawde, *Id – Od & Other Dimensions*

Rachid Koraïchi, *Love Side by Side with the Soul*

Rekha Rodwittiya, *The Rituals of Memory*

2015
Bernardo Siciliano, *Panic Attack*

Paresh Maity, *Cityscapes – Part I*

Salman Toor, *Resident Alien*

Husain at Hundred: Part II

Husain at Hundred

Jamini Roy, *Living Folk*

Sadequain, *Exaltations*

Rasheed Araeen, *Minimalism Then and Now*

Select Group Exhibitions

2020
Vernacular Automatism: Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim and Victor Ekpuk

Outside the Lines: Secular Vision in South Asian Modernism

2019
Intricacies: Fragment and Meaning

2018
Timeless India: 19th Century Photography of India

Pale Sentinels: Metaphors for Dialogues

2017
Interwoven Dialogues: Contemporary Art from Africa and South Asia

Portraits of Intervention: Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka

Seed for History and Form – Tebhaga

Culture of the Streets

2016
Tantric: The Corporeal and the Cosmic

Split Visions: Abstraction in Modern Indian Painting

Go Figure

Between Structure and Matter: Other Minimal Futures

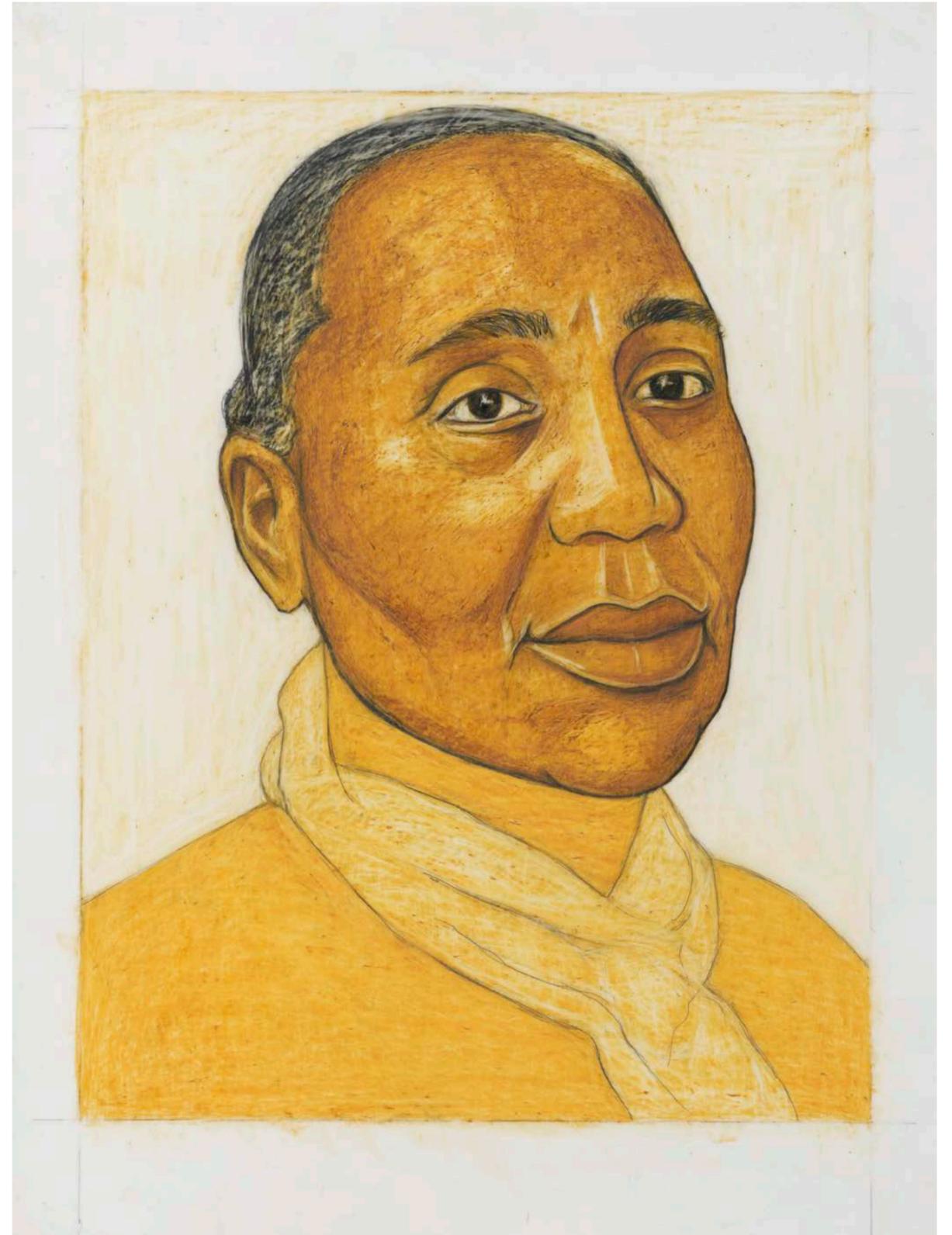
2015
Approaching Figuration: Modern and Pre-Modern Indian Art and the Figure

Approaching Abstraction: Works from the Herwitz Collection

Eat Pray Thug

Collections

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Museum of Modern Art
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
The Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
The Art Institute of Chicago
Kiran Nadar Museum of Art
Tate Modern
Tate Britain
Louvre Abu Dhabi



Thank you

Prajit and Aicon for your support! Harry, for your positivity. Timm and Hussain, thank you for your professionalism. Sebastian, for your luminous photography. Deirdre, thank you for your writing guidance. Jennie, thank you for Deirdre. Matt, for forging connections. Leila, for your gaze. Jordan, for your metaphors. Jodi and Brooke, thank you for providing context. Julieta and Maddy, for studio time and your readiness to play. Mom, for inspiring me. Dad and Thaytia, for your fierce love. Sule, for your hugs and for your life. Brian, thank you for being with me and for making me laugh. Kerry, thank you for your mentorship. Shaw Pong, Katherine, Christina, David, Emily, Erin, Maya, Kelly, thank you for talking deeply.

Introduction

Harry Hutchison

Essays

Mequitta Ahuja
Leila Grothe
Matthew Sharpe
Dr. Jordan Amirkhani
Jodi Throckmorton
Brooke Davis Anderson

Additional Thanks

Jie Ying Mei
Erica Kyung

Graphic Design

Alex McAdoo

Artwork Photography

Sebastian Bach

Printed by

Puritan Capital

Published by

Aicon Art, New York, 2020

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